

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DODE-00 EB-08 NSAE-00 USIA-06
TRSE-00 SOE-02 DOE-11 CIAE-00 COME-00 INR-07
ACDA-12 MCE-00 SS-15 NSC-05 PRS-01 DOTE-00 FAA-00
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R 111053Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 163
INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN
AMCONSUL DURBAN
AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PRETORIA 0175

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: BEXP, PARM, ESTC, SF
SUBJECT: AIRCRAFT SALES TO SOUTH AFRICA

REF: (A) STATE 331032, (B) STATE 4685

SUMMARY: IN REFTTEL A, DEPARTMENT ASKED FOR OUR VIEWS ON
END-USE CHECKS OF LIGHT PLANES SOLD TO SOUTH AFRICA.
WITH HELP OF CIVIL AVIATION REGISTER IT SHOULD BE POSSIBLE
TO TRACK DOWN MOST PLANES AND VERIFY THAT THEY ARE IN
CIVIL USE. WE COULD NOT HOWEVER CONDUCT MORE THAN A SMALL
SAMPLING WITH PRESENT LIMITED STAFFS. ALTHOUGH ONLY A
SMALL PERCENTAGE OF PLANES ARE REGISTERED IN AIR COMMANDOS
AND ONLY USED IN THIS CAPACITY FOR A FEW DAYS EACH YEAR,
WE DO NOT KNOW OF ANY RELIABLE WAY TO ASSURE AGAINST SUCH
USE. END SUMMARY

1. AIR COMMANDOS: EMBASSY HAS NO EVIDENCE THAT U.S.
MANUFACTURED AIRCRAFT ARE BEING DIVERTED FOR DIRECT USE
WITH SADF. AIR COMMANDO UNITS, HOWEVER, FORM SPECIAL
CASE. ACCORDING TO DAO PRETORIA, AIR COMMANDO UNITS
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HAVE CURRENT STRENGTH OF 10,000 PERSONNEL FORMED INTO
TWELVE UNITS. CERTAIN MEMBERS OF AIR COMMANDOS OWN OR
HAVE FULL USE (USUALLY THROUGH PERSONALLY-OWNED
COMPANIES) OF LIGHT AIRCRAFT WHICH ARE REGISTERED IN
THE COMMANDO. DAO ROUGHLY ESTIMATES NUMBER OF COMMANDO
AIRCRAFT AT 175-200. DURING PERIOD WHEN COMMANDO SERVES
ITS ANNUAL ACTIVE DUTY, THESE AIRCRAFT ARE USED BY

COMMANDO IN SUPPORT OPERATIONS FOR SADF INCLUDING TRANSPORT OF SUPPLIES, RECONNAISSANCE, AND VIP TRANSPORT AND ARE UNDER SADF COMMAND. DUTY PERIOD FOR AIRCRAFT BELIEVED TO BE AROUND TEN DAYS A YEAR PLUS ONE WEEKEND A MONTH. AIRCRAFT AND PERSONNEL ARE ALSO SUBJECT TO EMERGENCY MOBILIZATION SHOULD NEED ARISE. DURING PERIODS WHEN AIRCRAFT ARE IN USE BY COMMANDO, SADF COVERS FUEL COSTS. DAO BELIEVES COMMANDO AIRCRAFT HAVE NO SPECIAL MARKINGS AND IN MOST CASES ARE NOT BELIEVED TO HAVE ANY SPECIAL MILITARY EQUIPMENT NOR ARE THEY ARMED WHEN IN USE BY SADF. SINCE PREPONDERANCE OF PRIVATE PLANES IN SA ARE OF U.S. ORIGIN, CAN BE ASSUMED SAME HOLDS FOR PLANES REGISTERED IN COMMANDOS. LIST OF AIRCRAFT USED IN AIR COMMANDO IS NATURALLY CLASSIFIED BY SADF. WHILE A FEW AIRCRAFT OWNERS MIGHT BE WILLING TO ADMIT TO U.S. OFFICIALS THAT PLANES ARE BEING USED IN COMMANDO, MOST WOULD NOT DO SO. IT WOULD PROBABLY BE A CRIMINAL OFFENSE UNDER OFFICIAL SECRETS ACT TO REVEAL SUCH INFORMATION, AND SAG WOULD LIKELY OBJECT ONCE IT LEARNED OF SUCH LINE OF QUESTIONING. THERE IS THUS NO RELIABLE MEANS OF IDENTIFYING PLANES CURRENTLY BEING USED BY AIR COMMANDOS.

2. FLYING CLUBS: THERE HAS NOT BEEN ANY NEED TO USE FRONTS FOR AIR COMMANDO UNITS, AND WE DOUBT FLYING CLUBS HAVE BEEN PLAYING SUCH A ROLE. WHILE IT IS POSSIBLE A FEW FLYING CLUBS MAY BE OWNERS OF AIRCRAFT REGISTERED IN AIR COMMANDO, OUR IMPRESSION IS THAT
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GENERALLY AIR COMMANDO PLANES ARE INDIVIDUALLY OWNED. CONCERNING STATE 4685, WE DO NOT HAVE ANY MEANS FOR CHECKING WHETHER CLUBS MENTIONED ARE FRONTS FOR AIR COMMANDOS. IF DEPARTMENT WISHES US TO MAKE END-USE CHECKS ON AIRCRAFT ASSIGNED TO CLUBS WE COULD, IN COURSE OF VISIT TO CLUBS, ASK ABOUT AFFILIATION WITH AIR COMMANDOS. NEGATIVE RESPONSE COULD BE EXPECTED.

3. END-USE CHECKS: MONITORING OF END-USE OF U.S. MANUFACTURED AIRCRAFT IN SOUTH AFRICA IS COMPLICATED BY LARGE NUMBER OF LIGHT AIRCRAFT IN THE COUNTRY (ABOUT 3,000), THEIR WIDE GEOGRAPHICAL AND OWNERSHIP DISTRIBUTION, AND ACTIVE MARKET IN USED AIRCRAFT IN SOUTH AFRICA. SAG DIVISION OF CIVIL AVIATION (DCA) COMPILES A CIVIL AVIATION REGISTER, COPY OF WHICH IS MAINTAINED BY EMBASSY/DAO. REGISTER LISTS ALL CIVILIAN AIRCRAFT REGISTERED IN SOUTH AFRICA BY REGISTRY MARKINGS, SHOWING ALSO TYPE, SERIAL NUMBER AND NAME AND ADDRESS OF OWNER. IN ADDITION, DCA PUBLISHES MONTHLY REVISIONS OF REGISTER. DELETIONS STEM PRIMARILY FROM CRASHES (DEFINED AS AIRCRAFT TAKEN OUT OF SERVICE FOR ALMOST ANY TYPE OF DAMAGE OR DETERIORATION) AND EXPORTS. IN FIRST

NINE MONTHS OF 1977, 60 AIRCRAFT WERE DELETED DUE TO
CRASHES AND 38 WERE LISTED AS EXPORTED. REGISTER DOES
NOT GIVE COUNTRY OF DESTINATION OR NEW OWNER FOR EXPORTS.
IN RESPONSE TO OUR INQUIRY AT WORKING LEVEL OF
DCA, WE WERE TOLD THAT SUCH INFORMATION IS NOT MADE
AVAILABLE. DCA WAS NOT APPROACHED AT POLICY LEVEL.

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4. POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES FOR INSURING AGAINST USE OF
AMERICAN AIRCRAFT FOR UNAUTHORIZED PURPOSES:

A. INCLUDE CLAUSE IN FUTURE EXPORT LICENSES FOR-
BIDDING USE IN AIR COMMANDOS. THIS MIGHT DETER
ORIGINAL PURCHASER BUT WE DO NOT SEE HOW IT COULD BE
EFFECTIVE WITH SUBSEQUENT OWNERS.

B. SOLICIT COOPERATION OF SAG IN ASSURING THAT
PLANES SOLD IN FUTURE ARE NOT ASSIGNED TO COMMANDOS.
WE SERIOUSLY DOUBT WILLINGNESS OF SAG TO AGREE TO THIS
AND WE WOULD NOT HAVE ABILITY TO CHECK COMPLIANCE.

C. SPOT CHECK INDIVIDUAL PLANES USING CIVIL
AVIATION REGISTER TO ASCERTAIN CURRENT OWNER. THIS
MIGHT IN A FEW CASES PERMIT US TO ASCERTAIN WHETHER PLANE
IS REGISTERED IN AIR COMMANDOS BUT WOULD BE RELIABLE ONLY IN
ESTABLISHING PLANE'S PRINCIPAL ACTIVITY, I.E.,
THAT IT WAS IN COMMERCIAL OR RECREATIONAL USE AND
NOT CONVERTED TO MILITARY PURPOSES. PROBLEM WOULD
ALSO ARISE IN CHECKING DELETIONS, ESPECIALLY EXPORTS.
SUCH END-USE CHECKS WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY BECOME
KNOWN TO SAG AND COULD, AS PREVIOUSLY NOTED, CREATE

PROBLEMS IF WE PRESSED INDIVIDUALS TO DISCLOSE IN-
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FORMATION REGARDED AS SENSITIVE.

5. RECOMMENDED ACTION: IF IT IS DECIDED THAT A
VERY SMALL NUMBER OF PREVIOUSLY SOLD AIRCRAFT SHOULD
BE SUBJECTED TO END-USE CHECKS, EMBASSY AND CONSULATES
CAN ATTEMPT TO DO THIS. BELIEVE SAG CIVIL AVIATION
AUTHORITIES WOULD ASSIST TO EXTENT OF FURNISHING
CURRENTLY LISTED OWNERS IN SA FROM SERIAL NUMBERS
PROVIDED BY US. (IT SHOULD BE POSSIBLE BUT VERY
LABORIOUS TO DO THIS FROM LISTS NOW IN POSSESSION OF
DAO WHICH ARE IN ORDER OF REGISTRY MARKING.) HOW-
EVER, OWING TO SEVERELY LIMITED STAFFS, ESPECIALLY
IN JOHANNESBURG WHERE NO COMMERCIAL OFFICER IS NOW
ASSIGNED, CHECKS COULD NOT BE MORE THAN A SAMPLING
OPERATION.

IF MORE COMPREHENSIVE CHECKS WERE NEEDED, THEN TDY
ASSISTANCE WOULD BE ESSENTIAL. WE FORESEE, HOWEVER,
THAT VISIT OF AN INSPECTION TEAM COULD RUN INTO OB-
JECTIONS OF SAG AND MIGHT ALSO RECEIVE UNDESIRABLE
PUBLICITY. ACCORDINGLY, WE RECOMMEND THAT ONLY ONE
INDIVIDUAL BE DETAILED FROM STATE OR
COMMERCE FOR THIS PURPOSE. HIS ACTIVITIES WOULD HAVE TO BE
CLOSELY COORDINATED BY ECONOMIC SECTION OF EMBASSY. IN OUR
VIEW IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO ADVISE SAG OF OUR PLANS.

AS NOTED IN FOREGOING, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT US-
ORIGIN LIGHT PLANES DEVOTE A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF
FLIGHT HOURS TO PARAMILITARY PURPOSES. NEVERTHELESS,
WE DO NOT SEE HOW END-USE CHECKS COULD ESTABLISH CON-
CLUSIVELY THAT PLANES ARE NOT DETAILED FOR SUCH PUR-
POSES FROM TIME TO TIME. CHECKS WOULD OFFER US
REASONABLE ASSURANCE THAT PRINCIPAL APPLICATION IS NON-
MILITARY AND THAT PLANE HAS NOT BEEN EXPORTED TO
RHODESIA. IT WOULD ALSO MAKE CLEAR TO SAG SERIOUSNESS
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OF OUR DETERMINATION TO PREVENT CIVIL PLANES FROM BEING
DIVERTED TO MILITARY OR PARAMILITARY USES. BOWDLER

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